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6/24/98

NSC BRIEFING

28 February 1956

VIETNAMESE ELECTION

- I. Election of a South Vietnam National Assembly next Sunday (4 March) will complete long-drawn-out preparations to construct a popular base under Premier Diem's regime.
- A. 123-man body will be elected: its first task--approval of a Diem-drafted constitution.
- B. Draft (still unpublished) reportedly grants overriding authority to executive--including power to dissolve Assembly in cases of "serious conflict with the government."
- II. Delay in holding elections has been used by Diem regime both to organize new political parties, committed to support of regime, and to hamstring opposition groups.
- A. Opposition groups, protesting restrictive election regulations, have refused to enter their own lists of candidates.
1. Some individual opposition members have filed as independents, however.
- B. Apparently as a warning, Diem recently arrested, later released Phan Huy Dan, one of most vocal of opposition leaders.
- C. Press censorship theoretically lifted but heavy fines and imprisonment decreed for publication of material "designed to favor Communist or other anti-national activities."
- III. Meanwhile, South Vietnam government has reduced internal rebellion to lowest level yet achieved.

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- A. Recent negotiated surrender of one of two Hoa Hao rebel commanders, with over 1,000 troops, is important psychological victory for Diem.
- B. Simultaneously, Vietnamese army has moved into Cao Dai territory, thus virtually eliminating armed threat from that quarter.

IV. Viet Minh violently attacking elections plans in South.

- A. Hanoi has stated "Vietnamese people" will "transform elections into a bloody reply to the Americans and their lackeys."
- B. Viet Minh also calling for "massive boycott" of elections but at same time conceding that Diem will undoubtedly win at polls, as he did in the "Bao Dai referendum farce."

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VI

Probable that Viet Minh will use every means short of overt, traceable interference to disrupt polling.

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- A. Full capabilities for terrorism and sabotage unlikely to be employed, since appearance of scrupulous compliance with Geneva terms is important to Viet Minh from world propaganda standpoint.
- B. Communist line is that South, by its "unilateral elections" and refusal to consult on nationwide elections, is causing a breakdown of Geneva accord.
- C. Thus, Communists claim, new international conference is required.

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## SOUTH VIETNAMESE ELECTION

- I. Election of National Assembly next Sunday (4 March) will climax long-drawn-out government preparations to construct popular base under Premier Diem's regime.
  - A. 123 men to be elected: first task-- approval of a Diem-drafted constitution
  - B. Draft (still unpublished) reportedly grants overriding authority to executive--including power to dissolve Assembly in cases of "serious conflict with the government."
- II. Delay in Assembly election has been used by Diem both to organize new political parties (committed to his support), and to hamstring opposition.
  - A. Opposition groups, in protest over restrictive election regulations, have refused to enter their own lists of candidates.

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1. Some individual opposition

members have filed as independents, however.

B. Apparently as a warning, Diem recently arrested, later released Phan Huy Dan, one of most vocal of opposition.

C. Press censorship theoretically lifted but heavy fines and imprisonment decreed for publication of material "designed to favor Communist or other anti-national activities."

III. Meanwhile, South Vietnam government has reduced internal rebellion to lowest yet achieved.

A. Recent negotiated surrender of one two remaining Hoa Hao rebel commanders (with over 1,000 troops) is important psychological victory for Diem.

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B. Simultaneously, Vietnamese army has

moved into Cao Dai territory, thus eliminating armed threat from that quarter.

IV. Viet Minh violently attacking Diem's election plan.

A. Hanoi has stated "Vietnamese people" will "transform elections into bloody reply to Americans and their lackeys," called for "massive boycott of election."

B. At same time, Viet Minh conceding that Diem will undoubtedly win at polls, as was case in "Bao Dai referendum farce."

V. [REDACTED]

Viet Minh "plan of action" for election day, being circulated to cadres in South by word-of-mouth.

- A. Plan to keep down turn-out by spreading rumors of riots; also by posing as government functionaries advising voters to wait for a car to take them to polls.
- B. Also plan to send gangs of indoctrinated youths to polls, steal ballot boxes.

VI. Probable that Viet Minh will use every means short of overt, traceable interference to disrupt polling.

- A. However, doubt that full Viet Minh capabilities for terrorism and sabotage will be employed, since appearance of scrupulous compliance with Geneva terms is important to Viet Minh from world propaganda standpoint.

- B. Communist line is that South, by its "unilateral elections" and refusal to consult on nationwide elections, is causing breakdown of Geneva accord.
- C. Thus, Communists claim, new international conference is required.